



**U.S. Department of Education, Office of Indian Education**  
**Indigenous Educators State Leadership Network Engagement Session**  
Virtual Meeting, Sept. 5, 2023, 1 p.m.–2:30 p.m.

**Participants**

**Office of Indian Education (OIE):** Donna Sabis-Burns, Julian Guerrero, Crystal Moore  
**Synergy Enterprises, Inc. (Synergy):** Kathleen Bethke, Sarah Brightwell, Olani Lilly, Kaci Morgan, Doris Tinsley, Sarah Whitehead

**AIR:** Nara Nayar, Traci Maday-Karageorge, Emily Agopian

**Education Northwest:** Mandy Smoker-Broaddus

**Indigenous Educators State Leadership Network (IESLN):**

- Alex RedCorn – Kansas Advisory Committee on Indian Education Working Group
- Chuck Foster – UT
- Clarissa Jacobs-Roraback – NY
- Donnie Wetzell – MT
- Fred Osborn – SD
- Jane Harstad – MN
- Jen LaPointe – MI
- Joel Isaak – AK
- Judy Delgado – CA
- Kara Shaginoff – AK
- Lynnann Yazzie – AZ
- Maxine Alex – WA
- Melissa Isaac – MI
- Mona Halcomb – WA
- Nate Beelen – MI
- Randal Zotigh – OK
- Staci Block – San Diego County Office of Education

Not Present: CO, ID, FL, ME, NM, OR, WI, WY

**Opening Business**

**Welcome**

*Nara Nayar, Sarah Brightwell*

After welcoming participants, Ms. Nayar and Ms. Brightwell explained that the main discussion topic would be state Indian education advisory committees. Specifically, participants were to review findings from an in-progress white paper on the committees, and then to respond to prompts to offer advice and additional information to help OIE consider next steps for encouraging greater engagement and collaboration between states

and Tribes. First, however, Ms. Nayar provided group members with brief updates on IESLN business.

## **IESLN Business Updates**

*Nara Nayar*

### ***National Indian Education Association (NIEA) Reminders***

- Please [RSVP to AIR about attendance](#)
- Some support for travel and lodging is available, and letters will be provided on request if needed to justify travel funding.
- There will be an in-person IESLN meeting on Oct. 18 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- There will be a reception for the Indigenous Student Identification Project on Oct. 19 from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Invitations will go out this week and members should let AIR know if they want anyone else to be invited — please be sure to include both names and email addresses.
- AIR to compile and share a list of IESLN member presentations; please provide time and topic.
- The 50-state working group members will receive a report in the meeting that follows this one; others who are interested can request a copy.

## **OIE Business Updates**

*Donna Sabis-Burns, Sarah Brightwell*

Ms. Sabis-Burns thanked participants for attending during this busy time of year. She took a few moments to introduce the current OIE discretionary programs team, which includes herself, Linda Brake, Donna Bussell and Gabby Bugge. She then introduced the OIE technical assistance (TA) team from Synergy.

### ***Update on Circles of Reflection***

Before turning the focus to the main agenda topic, Ms. Sabis-Burns described a new iteration of the Circles of Reflection tool that was created for OIE State Tribal Education Partnership (STEP) grantees. This is available in a tool kit to anyone who would like to use it at <https://compcenternetwork.org/resources/resource/8164/circles-reflection-step-grant>.

## **The Landscape of State Indian Education Advisory Committees**

At OIE's request, Synergy has prepared a draft white paper on Native American and Alaska Native advisory committee landscape across the 50 U.S. states and territories. Ms. Brightwell explained that the research team reviewed public websites and made follow-up contacts to obtain or confirm information; this initial search identified a total of 16 committees. As background to the first discussion prompt, she presented some initial findings from the landscape scan:

- **Elements of highly engaged state committees**
  - Clearly defined and stated purposes

- Meet regularly
- Act as liaison between states and Tribes
- Make meeting minutes available to the public online
- Host tribal consultations
- Produce annual reports that include recommendations
- Work to increase access to Native language teacher certification and instruction
- **Numbers of committees (out of 16 total) with these elements in place**
  - General email contact available: 6
  - Stated goals: 11
  - Stated primary functions: 12
  - Public posting of meeting minutes: 8
  - Produce annual report: 3

Participants were then invited to offer responses to prompts. Summaries of their comments are provided here.

*Note: Throughout the meeting, participants spoke aloud and/or used the platform's chat feature to offer a range of rich comments to OIE.*

**Prompt #1: In addition to those identified in the landscape scan, what other elements should be present in a highly engaged state Indian education advisory committee?**

- One important element is having **statutory standing**, so the group doesn't start and stop at will.
- Kansas isn't in statute.
- It takes quite a bit of time to figure out how to appoint a committee and include Tribal voice.
- Arizona is just restarting our advisory council, which is in statute with our office. Prior superintendents ran the meetings but now they will be handled through my office. We're asking each of 22 Tribes to nominate three to four people, and we'll select based on expertise to get a range of knowledge. The goal is to have one person from each Tribe and then get parents and some other stakeholders. There is no dedicated budget for the council.
- In Minnesota, the Tribes choose who is on the Committee.
- Kansas is starting to move from the Kansas Advisory Council for Indigenous Education Working Group to a more formal council (in other words, dropping the working group and moving toward intergovernmental agreements). There is a strategic plan, and clearly articulated state-budgeted programs and services that support American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) families and students and do tribal consultation updates. The state superintendent of public instruction maintains a consistent presence at the meetings. Kansas has the ability to nominate a representative, and then nominate and approve representatives from urban/intertribal communities (local education agencies).
- **Funding** is important: which ones are operating with a budget?
- In California, the state superintendent of public instruction posts and selects the members of the American Indian Education Oversight Committee.

- Oklahoma just finished restarting the Indian Education Advisory Council. The state changed who could fill seats and now the governor appoints members. There are 18 seats and we're gathering to start Oct. 1. There is no budget, and the group is a subsidiary of the state department of education.
- In addition to statutory standing and budget, another important element is having **adequate staff support** to carry out goals. Participants noted that Oregon once had a .10 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff and now has five FTEs. Kansas is working toward paid staff and will have an advisory committee "Chair" (unpaid) but not necessarily an FTE.
- Smaller tribes with individuals split across lots of responsibilities tend to have a harder time being present at frequent meetings. So maybe do a small/medium/large tribe analysis of some kind to ensure representation.
- Ms. Nayar noted that in 2019, when the previous scan of committees was conducted, only four had budgets. The Minnesota Tribal Nations Education Committee (TNEC) has a budget of \$150,000 per year (<https://www.tnecmn.com/>).

### ***OIE Director's Welcome and Vision***

*Julian Guerrero*

Mr. Guerrero noted that he was also engaged in a Tribal Consultation that overlapped this meeting. He described his goal for this meeting as gathering information to inform OIE staff. His vision would have all advisory councils connected to the National Advisory Council on Indian Education (NACIE) and to one another — and perhaps a body similar to IESLN would emerge for the advisory councils. With that in mind, he hopes to answer questions like these: What can help these councils be effective, however they are created? How can councils fulfill their responsibilities and support one another? This is hard work that demands transparency, negotiation and life support. The metric to success may be relationships that lead to better awareness and more accessibility across Tribes to gain a sense of connectedness. The advisory councils don't always have clarity in their roles and maybe OIE can help with that. Today's questions are basic but will provide information that OIE will share with all participants.

Ms. Nayar noted that work toward creating a more accessible archive of state-level documents can perhaps include information from the advisory committees.

### ***More Findings from the Landscape Scan***

- **Functions described by existing committees**
  - Address unique educational needs and cultural well-being of NA students within the state's public education
  - Promote cultural sensitivity and inclusivity
  - Engage in the preservation of language and culture
  - Increase collaboration between state education departments and tribes
  - Increase parent and community involvement in schools
  - Create or provide culturally relevant curriculum
  - Collect and report on data related to NA students
  - Advocate and influence state education policy that affects NA students

- **Examples of committee goals**

- All American Indian K-20 students have equitable access to information and opportunities regarding postsecondary education, training, and preparation for career opportunities. (Montana)
- Ensure Idaho K-20 public educational institutions support all indigenous scholarship to recognize the distinct, unique knowledge and heritage of the federally recognized tribes of Idaho.
- Increase the number of teachers with Indigenous cultural and linguistic knowledge into classrooms to support Nevada tribal student success by ten teachers by 2025.
- Provide historical and cultural trauma of Native American children and strategies to all SES teachers and staff. (Nevada)

***Prompt #2: What other areas do you think an Indian education advisory committee should engage in to support Native student learning success?***

- The Washington state committee makes this statement: Helps to assure academic success and cultural integrity at the community, school, state, and tribal levels.
- Trauma-informed, resiliency-informed, culturally relevant training; **privileging Indigenous knowledge systems**
- Keep in mind the elders, the knowledge keepers — it's they more than the education system who can help to preserve native traditions; also involve youth groups to **get several generational perspectives**.
- One of the things I'm noticing — and it may not always be called this — but there needs to be a **"place-based" or localized emphasis on the learning to avoid being rolled into generic pan-Indianism**. In other words, including the local tribal nations is an important step in creating locally relevant (place-based) reforms in learning environments.
- **Hold the state accountable** for its obligations and responsibilities to Indigenous students and communities.
- These are the areas that we are considering addressing: School improvement, assessment accountability, data, family and community engagement, Native American language and culture, professional learning/development, student/Native youth, successful programs for NA students, policy
- The South Dakota Indian Education Advisory Council consults on the Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings & Standards, which are core concepts and cultural teachings of the nine tribes in South Dakota to ensure teaching of their culture and history to all South Dakota students.
- It is important to **know who the committee meets with**; ours not only meets with our office but with the superintendent of public instruction.
- With respect to **collecting data**, here's a suggested edit: Collect and report *accurate and relevant* data related to Native American students, *families and Nations*.
- More about data: Equitable policy and funding practices to support AI/AN students and families, high school graduation rates, A-G college readiness ("a-g" is California

slang for Honors, IB, AP, and similar courses), attendance rates, CAASPP testing, and relevant data that highlights tribal educational sovereignty programming best practices

- Increase collaboration and **relationship building** between *state education agencies (SEAs)*, *Tribal education agencies (TEAs)* and *local education agencies (LEAs)*.
- Our Tribal Nations Education Committee has also been designated by Tribes to conduct the ESSA Consultations for those *not* within 50 miles of a Tribal Nation
- Other areas for functions might include functions of the partners — collaborative governance, making joint decisions — consider the approach/framework alongside function. The question of how to bridge to committees isn't as relevant when you establish co-governance.
- The idea of **collaboration/co-governance** seems important and increasing collaboration between state and Tribes most important.
- It's also important to understand make-up, because we have students in **urban and rural areas**. We also have **early learning to higher education**, not just K-12.

### ***More Findings from the Landscape Scan***

Using a map graphic to show states with committees and states without, Ms. Brightwell asked this:

#### ***Do you know of states that do have committees we didn't find?***

- Utah didn't have a committee before I was hired. The outcomes were not good, so I revamped the structure and invited Title VI coordinators to the table. Now we meet every month, and it seems to be working. Our Title VI coordinators have a lot of information, especially with parents and schools. We do site visits; we talk about professional development and administration. We have an arm of the Native American legislative committee. Also, we have outreach to tribes, we hold meetings with tribal leaders and with educational organizations. So, it is a little different from other committees. The **Utah Title VI coordinators are a different system but similar in functions**.
- **New York** State does have the Native American Indian Education Committee.
- Ms. Nayar summed up mentions this way: So, New York has NAIEC, **Minnesota has TNEC**, Utah has Title VI coordinators, and **Kansas is working on a KACIEWG**.
- I am headed out to Connecticut at the end of the month. I can ask around for their education committees. Many of my Tribal nations here in New York would have their own education committees.
- I love the map. It looks like we **need a "west to east" expansion** of committees.

#### ***Prompt #3: How could OIE encourage starting committees?***

- Designate regions and **start communities of practice**, much like IESLN. See if they can build capacity to formalize their work.
- **Share stories** from other state committees.
- Ours grew out of the **community building** from a state professional organization (Kansas Association for Native American Education).
- **Sharing this report and this map** could galvanize action in some states.

- **Find an existing group** to help it get going.
- We also have two education consortiums out here in New York.

**Prompt #4: What are the biggest barriers to starting committees?**

- It would be helpful to have a chart to see how many AI/AN students per state, number of tribes, and the number of SEA staff supporting AI/AN programming.
- Please include the NY State Indigenous Education Advisory Council.
- We should make clear that a **state doesn't need to have many tribes to get value** from a council.
- New York has Northern and Western Consortiums, and they include institutions of higher education. They update one another on what's working and not working for high school and college. In New England states, there are Tribal nations, so perhaps committees there.
- Here are a couple of ideas: Has there been a **call to action**? Sometimes people don't know this is possible. It doesn't need to have politicians, can be just regular people. In Illinois, they recruited an Indigenous group to help update state standards. Make this conversation broader to get ideas for outreach, too. Illinois is working with the Chicago American Indian Community Collaborative's education subcommittee.
- I'm curious about governance parity when we talk about SEAs and TEAs. When we talk about having elected Tribal leaders involved, are we talking about involving elected state leaders as well? Where do recommendations go — **who is the target for recommendations?**
- With a white paper like this, it would be helpful to **have a list of examples of things that can be tackled in collaborative ways**. We were able to bring a concrete list of things to work on in Kansas to get ours rolling — curriculum, data, unused Title VI monies, etc.
- In Oklahoma, we do an annual report with the Oklahoma State Board of Education. We also meet monthly with Tribal and education leaders; we **take multiple approaches**.

**More Findings from the Landscape Scan**

Noting that information was gathered mainly from websites and may not be complete, Ms. Brightwell presented two more graphics created from the landscape scan findings.

- **Meeting frequency:** Schedules reported by the 16 committees in the landscape scan showed that meeting frequency varies, with two committees meeting more than once a month, four committees meeting monthly, six committees meeting quarterly, and four committees showing some other meeting schedule.
- **Presence of Indian education directors (total of 22):** As might be expected, a map that indicated the 22 states and territories that have Indian education directors looked quite similar to the map of states with Indian education advisory committees.

For this scan, “director” was defined as any Indian education point of contact. Participants were asked to provide information about others who may have been missed during the scan.

Ms. Nayar noted that AIR is working on several draft scans, including one examining SEA Indigenous education staffing, that will be part of the in-person meeting discussions at NIEA. These scans are based on the surveys and interviews completed by IESLN states earlier this year

#### **Prompt #5: Questions About Communications**

*How can OIE get committees connected to the OIE listserv so they know about events?*

*Should committees be encouraged to attend NACIE?*

*Should NACIE have a subcommittee for state Indian education committees?*

- OIE staff members could make a point to **attend some committee meetings** and to start building relationships.
- Ms. Sabis-Burns asked participants to **forward invitations to OIE** and we would be happy to oblige when time allows.
- I **like a subcommittee**; it can quickly get really large to have all committee members attend NACIE. Subcommittees might help, so **states have a liaison** to share information back and forth.
- For the folks doing this work, **bandwidth might be the biggest hurdle** — one more committee. But it’s a great idea.

#### **Prompt #6: Questions About Support**

*How can OIE support, uplift and tap into the ongoing work of committees?*

*What are short-term vs. long-term considerations regarding supporting committees?*

- What you’re doing here is a good starting point—just **knowing what’s happening**. Other support like **travel budgets** would help.
- OIE could **have a meet-and-greet at NIEA** to do more connecting. IESLN started as an informal meeting, so **find places where Indigenous leaders already gather**.
- Ms. Sabis-Burns noted that **Mr. Guerrero will do a Town Hall at NIEA** and **OIE will send the date and time** once they’re available.
- Ms. Nayar suggested that participants are welcome to **invite advisory council members to the NIEA reception** for student identification project members. Participants can send their contact information to AIR. OIE staff are also welcome to attend.
- **Form communities of practice** to share best practices.

#### **Wrap Up, Next Steps**

*Sarah Brightwell*

Ms. Brightwell again thanked IESLN members for their time, and invited them to send more ideas to [OIE@seiservices.com](mailto:OIE@seiservices.com). She noted the white paper on state Indian education advisory committees will be complete in the next month or two, and it will be shared.

Participants who would like to be on the OIE listserv can send a request to [OIE@ed.gov](mailto:OIE@ed.gov). The OIE website is also a good place to keep up with activities; visit the homepage at <https://oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-indian-education/>